

Editorial

Early case of childhood cirrhosis in 1876

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Abstract

Cirrhosis is a lesion of the liver that was first named in 1847, there being “widespread disruption of normal liver structure by fibrosis.” The world-wide nature of it is shown by a Chinese account which mentioned 1934 as the first publication of a type of it. A search of the literature revealed the appreciation of the likelihood of its occurrence being underestimated. The occasional cases have been published. Therefore, this case is promoted as an early one dating to 1876.

Introduction

In Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary (1), cirrhosis is defined as “widespread disruption of normal liver structure by fibrosis.” It was added that the name came into use in 1847.

Of great interest is its epidemiologic manifestations all over the world. For instance, in China (2), as far back as 1961, it was being hoped that postmortem examination will throw light on it. Indeed, 1934 was when it was cited as the first publication of a neonatal form. Others have naturally followed (3-6). Therefore, the case dating back to 1876 is deemed to be worthy of documentation.

Historical case

Abridgement of the case is in the form as it was delivered for Dr Griffiths of Swansea by Henry Green on December 7, 1875 (7). The specimen of cirrhosis of the liver is from a female child ten years of age, who died on November 17th. It is as follows:

On post-mortem examination the liver was found to be an excellent specimen of a small contracted (cirrhotic) liver [the liver, heart, and kidneys were exhibited at the Pathological Society]. It weighed only 15 ounces; the peritoneal covering was smooth and shiny all over; the whole of the organ was hard, very tough, and irregularly lobulated, and granular on the surface. On section it appeared to the naked eye to consist chiefly of tough fibrous tissue interspersed with irregular lobules (varying in size and colour) of the true liver substance, in different stages of strangulation and degeneration. The portal veins were greatly enlarged. The spleen was as large as the liver, hard and tough.

Remarks. – This is an excellent specimen of a cirrhotic liver from a child aged 10, without any evidence whatever, on the most careful and satisfactory inquiry, of it having been produced by the use of alcoholic drink or irritating food of any kind; neither was there a particle of evidence of hereditary syphilis, of previous history of rickets, diseased bones, or chronic abscess.

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Discussion

It has been affirmed by Burnet (8) that research deserves to be carried out after looking up historical antecedents. In like manner, Moser (9) was delighted that the “truths” of the day require being traced to yester years! Accordingly, this paper presents the 1876 example of cirrhosis in childhood. I am persuaded that it ranks with others in my vintage historical papers (10-12).

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